

# Exploring Tam McArthur Rim

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Our continuing dearth of precipitation is a disaster for the mountains, the snowpack, our water supply, and the skiing industry; but it does serve to extend the hiking season. Although, with dry lake-bottoms exposed, brooks dried up, and vegetation brown and bleak, the scenery isn't what we're accustomed to in the mountains. Yet there are some destinations that still have plenty to offer.

So, when a friend asked me how recently I last wrote up Tam McArthur Rim, I had to think about it a bit. The Rim is one of our area's most popular hikes, and it has been more than six years since it last popped up in my column. Well, I thought, I guess I'd better do something about that! So, off we went.

Looking up to the mountains from Sisters, Tam McArthur Rim is the high ridge visible below and to the left of Broken Top. Nearby Three Creek Lake is the jumping-off point for this hike, and the lake is easy enough to find. Just follow — you probably figured this out — Three Creek Lake Road.

The trail starts its ascent from the left side of the road near the southeast corner of the lake. It ascends steeply for the first quarter of a mile before the pitch becomes a bit more moderate. The total

distance, one way, is about 2.5 miles. Along the way, there are some spectacular views of the lake and the Three Sisters Mountains.

About a mile up the slope, the trail enters the Three Sisters Wilderness, so you should have already filled out and be carrying your free wilderness permit. Once inside the wilderness, the grade becomes more gradual. Eventually, the trail enters a large open area. Continue on and up the steep pitch ahead. When the trail is fully atop the ridge, the trees thin out, and the landscape opens up even more.

In recent years, the Forest Service has endeavored to better define the trail and consolidate the myriad user trails formed over the years. Signage has also seen some (modest) improvement. Follow the well-worn path leading straight ahead to the higher ground marking the edge of the Rim itself.

At more than 7,700 feet, the Rim rivals the elevation of such prominent local peaks as Mt. Washington and Three Fingered Jack. Breathtaking vistas look down on Three Creek Lake and Little Three Creek Lake, a thousand feet below.

The Rim is named for Lewis A. "Tam" McArthur, a Portland businessman who was appointed, by Gov. Oswald West, to the Oregon Geographic Names Board

in 1914. Two years later, McArthur became the board's secretary, a position in which he served for the next 33 years.

During that time, McArthur literally "wrote the book" on "Oregon Geographic Names." His interest in Oregon history and geography led him to compile and publish the first edition of Oregon place names in 1928. Although McArthur died in 1951, his son, Lewis L. McArthur, assumed responsibility for the work, which is presently in its seventh edition. It remains the definitive resource on the history of Oregon geographic names and is published by the Oregon Historical Society Press.

Ironically, according to his son, the rim that bears McArthur's name is probably one of the few prominent geographic features in Oregon that he never visited. The younger McArthur also notes that his father would probably not have approved of the use of a nickname (Tam) on a geographic feature.

The official trail ends near the summit at a sign that, appropriately enough, simply says "End of Trail." Any spot along the rim is an idyllic place to stop, relax, gaze into the distance and explore your contemplative side. If you're the more fidgety type who has a hard time sitting still, be sure to bring a lunch so you can justify a little down-time.



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Tam McArthur Rim rises above Three Creek Lake.

We met a lone woman at the end of the trail. She was quietly eating lunch, and we chatted a bit. We learned that she was from The Valley. An avid hiker, this was her first time at the Rim. She told us that her son had told her she should come here because it was a very special place.

We didn't want to impose on her solitude and found a comfortable spot for our own lunch before heading back down. As we began our descent, the lady suddenly joined us; and we quickly discerned that she was longing for companionship. What she hadn't told us earlier, she confided now. Yes, she was there at her son's suggestion; but she was also there to scatter his ashes at a place that he had considered to be special.

Keeping the rim at our left, we returned by a slightly different route, probably not one

approved as an "official" trail, but well-worn, nonetheless. Eventually, this trail rejoined the original trail.

The Tam McArthur Rim Trail is reached by heading south from Sisters on Elm Street, which becomes Three Creek Lake Road. The pavement ends at about fourteen miles. Continue another two miles toward the lake. The road here is in really rough shape. A passenger car can probably negotiate the road very slowly; but, even in my truck, it sometimes felt like an amusement-park ride.

The trailhead appears on your left and is well marked. Parking is at roadside, but there is also a parking lot at the junction of Forest Road 900, which leads to the Driftwood Campground. If you drive to within sight of the lake, you've gone a short distance too far.

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